

International Education: China

As China reemerges as a leader in the world's economy, it is imperative that students be exposed to China's rich cultural history. The Chinese have told each other stories for many different reasons—to teach things to their children, to make each other laugh, to record their feelings and observations and to explain how things got to be the way they are. Thus, common themes in Chinese folktales and myths revolve around filial piety, triumph of good over evil, supremacy of wisdom over sheer physical strength, and cleverness or resourcefulness. Through these stories, Chinese values, traditions and customs are passed from one generation to the next.

To complete the story and activities, allocate approximately two 50 minute periods.

I. Content

I want my students to understand:

- A. The contributions made by the Chinese to the world's folk literature
- B. Identify the themes or main ideas within a folktale
- C. Describe the characteristics of a folktale
- D. Analyze the elements of literature (character, setting, plot, conflict, mood, and theme) in the folktale

II. Prerequisites:

To be successful with this lesson, the student must already understand:

- A. The elements of literature as listed above
- B. How to determine the main idea of a passage

III. Instructional Objective:

- A. The students will develop a new perspective on Chinese culture and understand the nature of Chinese people's beliefs and values
- B. Students will improve their reading strategies and cognitive skills of classification and comparison

IV. Materials and Equipment:

Teacher: Overhead projector

Teacher Handout #1: Transparencies of "Facts about China"

Teacher Handout # 2: Transparency of "Monkey King" pictures

Teacher Handout #3: Background information on "The Monkey King" —see "Instructional Procedures"

Available Internet Sites for background information:

<http://www.china-on-site.com/monkey.php> (background information on "Monkey King" and the complete text of *Journey to the West*)

<http://www.purifymind.com/JourneyWest.htm> (explanation of *Journey to the West*)

<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9502E4DC1639F935A35750C0A965948260>
(*New York Times* article on *Journey to the West*)

International Education: China

<http://www.internationalhero.co.uk/m/monkey.htm> (“resume” on the skills of the monkey king)

Students: Paper for note taking

Copies of the following handouts:

- **Teacher Handout #1:** Facts About China
- **Teacher Handout #3:** The Monkey Spirit Story
- **Student Handout #1:** Reader Response: “The Monkey Spirit”

V. **Instructional Procedure:**

This lesson could be integrated into an existing study of folk literature or mythology.

A. Students take notes on the background and origin of the “Monkey King” character and concepts contained in the “Monkey Spirit”.

- Explain that the “Monkey King”, is a short version of the classic Chinese tale *Journey to West*, written by Wu Chengen about 500 years ago during the Ming Dynasty. It is one of the renowned classical Chinese novels about an allegorical rendition of the journey, mingled with Chinese fables, fairy tales, legends, superstitions, popular beliefs, monster stories as well as whatever the author could find in the Taoist and Buddhist religions. It was based on a true story of a famous Chinese monk, Xuan Zang (602-664). After years of trials and tribulations, he traveled on foot to what is today India, the birthplace of Buddhism, to seek for the Sutra, the Buddhist holy book. When he returned to China, or the Great Tang as China was called at that time, he started to translate the sutras into Chinese, thus making a great contribution to the development of Buddhism in China. Monkey King is indeed a rebellious extraordinary being, born out of a rock, fertilized by the grace of Heaven. He learned all the magic tricks and kung fu from a master Taoist and is, therefore, an extremely smart and capable being.
- Taoism is a collection of cultural history, folktales, and religions that have been passed down in oral or written form. There are several aspects to Chinese mythology, including creation myths and legends and myths concerning the founding of Chinese culture and the Chinese state. Like many mythologies, some people believe it to be a factual recording of history.
- Historians have conjectured that the Chinese mythology began in 12th century B.C. (close to the time of the Trojan War). The myths and legends were passed down in oral format for over a thousand years, before being written down in early books such as *Shui Jing Zhu* and *Shan Hai Jing*. Other myths continued to be passed down through oral traditions such as theatre and song, before being recorded in the form of novels such as *Fengshen Yanyi*.
- Review the unknown vocabulary. Words that might be difficult for students are: alchemists, Buddha, invulnerable, and strife.

B. Divide the class into learning groups and have them read “The Monkey Spirit” (**Teacher Handout #3**) together and complete the “Reader-Response Activity” (**Student Handout 1**).

C. Students gather as a class to share their responses.

International Education: China

VI. Assessment/Evaluation:

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be demonstrating success in identifying the elements of literature that are present in “The Monkey Spirit” (**Teacher Handout #3**). Students should be able to complete the “Reader-Response Activity” (**Student Handout #1**) and discuss their answers with the class.

VII. Idaho Achievement Standards:

Standard 1: Reading

7.LA.1.8.3 Use prior knowledge, the text, context clues, and graphic features of text to predict, clarify, and/or expand word meanings and concepts.

Standard 2: Comprehension/Interpretation

Goal 2.1: Acquire Strategies and Skills for Comprehending Text

7.LA.2.1.1 Evaluate the purpose and use of various texts.

7.LA.2.1.3 Make inferences, draw conclusions, and form opinions based on information gathered from text, and cite evidence to support.

Goal 2.3: Acquire Skills for Comprehending Literary Text

7.LA.2.3.1 Read and respond to literature from a variety of genres, including poetry

7.LA.2.3.4 Analyze plot development

7.LA.2.3.5 Recognize points of view

7.LA.2.3.6 Analyze the themes of various genres

VIII. Follow-up Activities:

A. Students in literature groups select another Chinese folktale to study and present to the class. Resources for stories are listed below (be sure to survey the stories for appropriate content):

<http://www.englishdaily626.com/stories.php?017>

<http://www.chinavista.com/experience/fable/fable.html>

<http://www.newton.mec.edu/Angier/DimSum/Chinese%20Folktales.html>

B. The symbol of the “monkey king” permeates Chinese society. Using the resources listed below as a starting point, have students research the campaign to have the “monkey king” as the mascot for the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. (This was NOT a successful campaign.)

http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2004-01/19/content_300326.htm (chronicles the campaigning for the “monkey king” to be the official 2008 Olympic mascot)

<http://www.china.org.cn/english/2003/Nov/79558.htm>

(Another news article on whether the “monkey king” should be the official 2008 Olympic mascot. Background information would be interesting to middle school students.)

Teacher Handout 1

FACTS ABOUT CHINA

Background Information:

For centuries China stood as a leading civilization, outpacing the rest of the world in the arts and sciences. But in the 19th and early 20th centuries, China was beset by civil unrest, major famines, military defeats, and foreign occupation. After World War II, the Communists under MAO Zedong established an autocratic socialist system that, while ensuring China's sovereignty, imposed strict controls over everyday life and cost the lives of tens of millions of people. After 1978, his successor DENG Xiaoping and other leaders focused on market-oriented economic development and by 2000 output had quadrupled. For much of the population, living standards have improved dramatically and the room for personal choice has expanded, yet political controls remain tight.¹

Area: Fourth largest country in the world (1st = Russia, 2nd = Canada, 3rd = United States)

Population: China - world's most populated country with 1.3 **billion** people
United States - 295,734,134
7.6 million people live in Beijing, the capital city of China

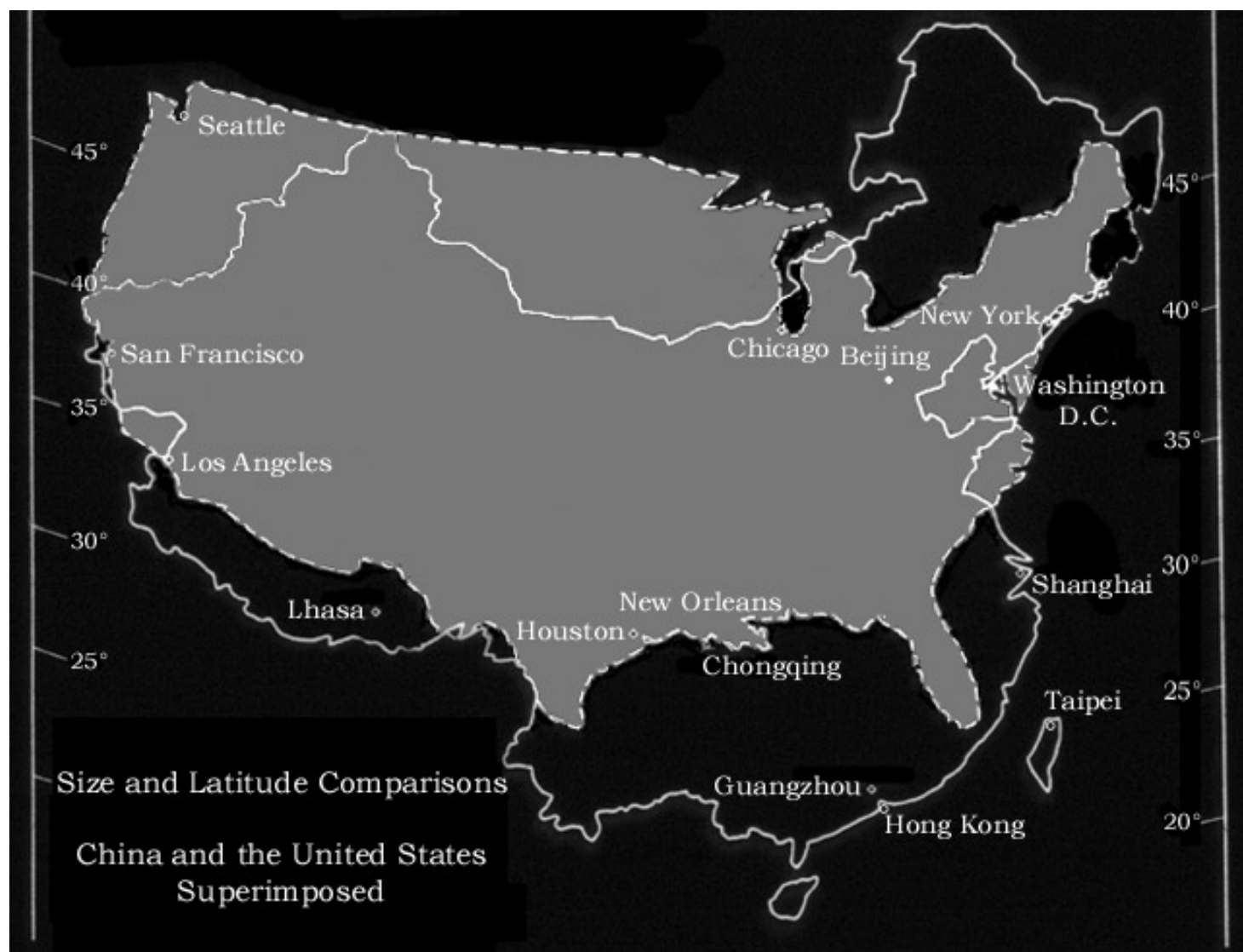
Government: Communist

Interesting Facts:

- 24% of the world speaks Chinese. According to some estimates, there are more English speaking people in China than in the United States.
- According to economists, China will become the world's wealthiest nation by the year 2012.
- China manufactures 60% of the world's bicycles (the United States buys 86% of the world's bicycles).
- In September, 2005 China surpassed Canada as the #1 exporter of goods to the United States.
- During the period of 1990 to 2005 Chinese exports to the United States increased 1600%. That's 16 times more exports in only 16 years.
- In 1870, 30% of Idaho's population was Chinese.
- China is Idaho's largest trade partner. (Integrated circuits, not potatoes)

¹ <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>

Teacher Handout 1





A cartoon portrait of the Monkey King.



The Monkey King in Buddha's hand.



A modern drawing of the Monkey King's origins.

Renditions of the Monkey King

Teacher Handout 3

A monkey was born from a stone egg that had been fertilized by the wind as it lay on the peak of a mountain. For having found a heavenly grotto in which other monkeys would reside safely, the stone monkey became the Monkey King of the monkey tribe. He soon became very adept at magic arts and learned skills from a Taoist immortal who among other things gave him the personal name of Discoverer of Secrets, and taught him to change his shape at will and to fly through the air. The Monkey King organized all the monkeys and slew a monster who was persecuting them. He obtained a magic weapon from the Dragon King of the Eastern Sea with which he began to make himself a master of the four quarters.

After a great feast given in his honor, Monkey fell asleep in the shade of a pine tree. In this sleep he saw two men approach. They tied him with rope and dragged him to the King of Death, who had him chained in the Region of Darkness.

However, he broke his bonds and stole the register of deaths from which he deleted his own name and that of all monkeys making them immortal. As a result of all the trouble which he caused he was summoned to Heaven Stables to keep him quiet.

All was peaceful until the Monkey King learned from the other ministers that his new position was one with no rank. He started angrily breaking everything up in heaven and then withdrew to a mountain. The Lord of Heaven called for a siege of the mountain, but was repulsed by the Monkey King. Seeing that the only way to keep him from doing more harm was to keep him in heaven under their watchful eyes, the Lord of Heaven and his followers agreed that the Monkey King would be accorded a new title, The Great Sage, Equal to Heaven. When the Monkey King heard of his new position, he agreed once again to behave himself. Unbeknownst to the Monkey King, his residence was built next to the Garden of Immortal Peaches, a source of immortality. But because he had no duties, he idled away his time becoming chummy with various stars and heavenly constellations. Other immortals were afraid that his idleness would lead to more roguery. They asked the Lord of Heaven to give him a duty to perform. Thus, the Monkey King was made Superintendent of the Garden of Immortal Peaches.

Unfortunately he was not invited to come to the Peach Festival (held every 3000 years), and to revenge himself he not only ate all the food and wine prepared for the feast but also stole the Pills of Immortality. As the Monkey King had already eaten the peaches, he was therefore made immortal.

He retired to his mountain kingdom, but his irresponsible behavior had now infuriated all the gods and goddesses. After a long siege in which the Monkey King employed all his magic skills to avoid defeat, he was finally captured and brought before the Jade Emperor, who condemned him to death as a criminal in revolt against the Heavenly Throne. The sentence could not, however, be carried out because the monkey King was protected both by the peaches and the pills. He was handed over to Lao Tzu (the father of Taoism) to be distilled in the alchemists' furnace.

The furnace was heated to white heat for forty-nine days, but at the end of this time the Monkey King lifted the lid and threatened to destroy Heaven. In despair, the Jade Emperor sent for the Buddha, who asked Monkey King why he wished to possess Heaven. The Monkey King's reply was that he knew with certainty that he was sufficiently powerful to rule Heaven. When the Buddha demanded proof for his claim, the Monkey King explained that he was immortal, invulnerable, able to change his shape in 72 different ways, to fly through the air and to leap a distance of 108,000 li (li=1/3 of a mile).

The Buddha doubted whether the Monkey King could even jump out of the Buddha's palm, but agreed that if the Monkey King was successful, then he was surely entitled to rule the Heaven. So the Monkey King leaped into the air and sprang across Heaven to the furthest corners of the earth, where he came to rest at the base of a great mountain, where he urinated as animals do when they wish to make out territory of their own. Then he returned in a single bound and confronted the Buddha.

But the Buddha laughed at his claim of having traversed the whole universe at a single bound and showed him that the mountain where he had urinated was but the base of one of the Buddha's

Teacher Handout 3

fingers and that he had not even escaped from the palm of the Buddha's hand. Then the Buddha created a magic mountain and shut the Monkey King up within it.

Here he would have remained but the Goddess of Mercy obtained his release so that the Monkey King might accompany a monk on a great pilgrimage to the Western Paradise (India) to get authentic versions of the Buddha's teachings. The Monkey King swore faithfully to obey his new master and to protect him from perils. He did this despite many temptations and dangerous situations on the way.

On their return, the turtle who was carrying them across a flooded river left them to sink, because the Monkey King's companion had not fulfilled the promise he made to turtle on the way to the destination. But they swam safely to shore and were greeted with great honors by the Emperor of China and the people.

Their final honors came from a heavenly committee of welcome presided over by the Buddha Yet To Come. The Monkey King was made God of Victorious Strife. At the beginning of the pilgrimage a helmet had been fitted on the Monkey King's head which contracted upon his skull when he was wayward or wanton. The agony of the contractions had caused him to refrain from wickedness. When, therefore, he was given his new title, the Monkey King begged to have his helmet removed since he had now become an enlightened one. The answer that was given was that if the Monkey King Was indeed enlightened, the helmet would have gone of its own accord. The Monkey King reached up to feel his head and found that the helmet had disappeared.

Student Handout 1

Reader Response: “The Monkey Spirit”

1. Describe the mood of this story and give two or more supporting details.

2. List three or more specific details that support this statement, “The monkey king is a mischievous character.”

3. This story is told from what point-of-view? Circle one and give two specific details to support your response.

First person
Second person
Third person objective
Third person limited
Third person omniscient

4. What is the significance of the helmet on the monkey king’s head? What does its disappearance represent?

5. Folktales and myths are used to teach the values of a culture. What values are taught in “The Monkey Spirit”? Give specific examples. Are these values important in American culture? Support your answer.

Student Handout 1

6. In your group, discuss any other folktales or myths that have similar themes. List the stories and themes.

7. Complete the table below.

Characters	
Setting(s)	
Conflict	
Resolution	
Theme	